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The Grant Survival Kit

The ten reasons grant applications get rejected, the funder-fit test to run before you write a word, the outcomes translator that turns activities into fundable impact, and the pre-submission check.

For charities, schools, CICs and community groups applying for their own funding.

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Ten reasons grant applications get rejected

Most rejections aren't about the quality of your work — they're about the quality of the application. These are the patterns funders and assessors reject again and again.

- 01** Wrong funder, right cause — The project doesn't match the funder's published priorities. No amount of good writing fixes bad fit — see the funder-fit test in Part Two.

- 02** Activities dressed as outcomes — 'We will run 12 workshops' is an activity. Funders buy change: what will be different for whom, by how much, by when.

- 03** Unevidenced need — 'There is a clear need in our community' scores nothing. Cite the data: local statistics, waiting lists, survey results, referral numbers.

- 04** The budget doesn't match the story — The narrative promises one thing, the budget funds another. Assessors check line by line.

- 05** Everything for everyone — A project serving 'young people, older people and families' reads as unfocused. Narrow beneficiary, deeper impact, higher score.

- 06** The sustainability question dodged — 'We will seek further funding' is not a plan. Name the exit route: earned income, commissioning, another named funder, or a defined end.

- 07** No delivery credibility — Who runs it, what have they delivered before, what happens if they leave? Funders back teams, not just ideas.

- 08** Copy-paste applications — Assessors spot recycled text that ignores their questions. Every answer must reference this funder's criteria and language.

- 09** Overclaiming impact — Promising to 'transform the community' with £8,000 destroys trust. Modest, measurable and believable beats grand.

- 10** Missed technicalities — Word limits, required attachments, safeguarding policies, accounts, eligibility rules. Non-compliance is rejection before reading.

PART TWO

The funder-fit test: five questions before you write a word

A weak-fit application costs you a week and scores nothing. Run this test first. Any 'no' means find another funder or reshape the project — not the wording.

- 1** Do we match their published priorities? — Read the guidance and their last twenty awards, not just the homepage. Would this project sit naturally in that list?

- 2** Are we eligible on the technicalities? — Legal structure, income band, geography, project type, match-funding rules. Check every one before drafting.

- 3** Is our ask in their range? — Look at their typical grant size. Asking £40,000 from a funder averaging £5,000 wastes everyone's time.

- 4** Can we evidence the need they care about? — Funders fund their mission through you. Map your evidence to their stated outcomes, not yours.

- 5** Can we actually deliver in their timeframe? — Spend deadlines, reporting cycles, staff capacity. A returned grant is worse than no grant.

PART THREE

The outcomes translator

Funders score outcomes, applicants write activities. Use this three-step translation on every main answer.

Step 1 — Activity (what you do): 'We run weekly money-skills workshops for Year 5 pupils.'

Step 2 — Outcome (what changes): 'Pupils can explain the difference between needs and wants and make a simple spending plan.'

Step 3 — Impact (why it matters, evidenced): 'Measured by pre/post assessment across 240 pupils, targeting a 30-point gain, contributing to the funder's financial-inclusion outcome.'

If an answer stops at Step 1, it isn't finished. Numbers, baselines and a measurement method turn a nice idea into a fundable one.

The pre-submission check

- ☐ Every question answered directly — First sentence of each answer responds to the question asked, in the funder's own language.

- ☐ Outcomes, numbers, baselines — Each main answer passes the translator test in Part Three.

- ☐ Budget reconciles with narrative — Every promised activity has a budget line; every budget line appears in the story.

- ☐ Need evidenced with sources — Data cited, dated and attributable — not asserted.

- ☐ Governance pack ready — Accounts, constitution/articles, safeguarding policy, bank details, trustee/director list — whatever the funder lists.

- ☐ Word limits respected — Over-limit text is cut or ignored. Check every box.

- ☐ Sustainability answered honestly — A named route, not a hope.

- ☐ Fresh eyes pass — Someone who didn't write it reads it against the funder's criteria before it goes.

WHEN THE DEADLINE IS ALREADY ON TOP OF YOU

Send it to the desk

If the application is due soon and you already know it isn't strong enough, we take what you have and return a stronger, clearer, better-evidenced draft in 72 hours — written to the funder's criteria. You stay the author.

Rapid Check — £295 fixed. Your near-final application reviewed against the funder's criteria, with direct written feedback on where it will lose marks and what to change.

Sprint Pro — £1,500 fixed. The full 72-hour rebuild of an urgent grant application.

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